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AUTHOR Warren, Jonathan R.
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ABSTRACT

In an identification of the varieties of student behavior that enter faculty judgments of academic performance, 311 faculty members in 15 colleges and universities described how a good student and a poor student each differed from an ordinary student in one of their classes. Content analysis of these descriptions identified about 100 separate phrases that could be grouped into seven major categories and 18 subcategories. The frequency with which the different categories were used varied with the faculty member's field, sex, age, and orientation to teaching and with the level of the class. [Reproduced from best available copy.] (Author)

Student Behavior Underlying Faculty Judgments of Academic Performance

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Jonathan R. Warren
Educational Testing Service

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Higher education is alive with calls to restructure the bachelor's degree program--trim time from the traditional four years, to devise learning experiences not confined to the campus, to accommodate people who have not previously found the traditional programs acceptable, and generally to move beyond the familiar patterns and constraints under which higher education has traditionally been offered. A common theme in many of the proposals for educational rejuvenation is the contention that new, more varied more flexible processes must be established for bringing students of all kinds to the state of educational accomplishment at which a bachelor's degree is awarded. Yet strangely, no attempt is made to define or describe what a bachelor's degree is to represent other than an arbitrary educational terminal point.

The basic structure of almost all degree programs consists of four academic years under instruction while the student studies a selected field in some depth, a broader range of other more diverse academic areas, and a few skill courses--English composition, physical education, perhaps mathematics or a foreign language (Dressel & DeLisle, 1969). This collection of academic activities is to produce a liberally educated person with special competence in a particular academic area. The award of a bachelor's

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degree signifies completion of the process. That basic structure is not being challenged by the innovative programs that have been springing up all over the country; they fit comfortably within it. But is it an adequate framework for higher education?

Is a four-year combination of studies in breadth and depth, in about a two-to-one relationship between breadth and depth, the most useful pattern of post-secondary education? What particular qualities does it have to recommend it over any of a variety of possible alternative educational structures? Why should not either the breadth or the depth components of the present degree be recognized as a unified educational experience apart from the other component? Are there not any number of other potential combinations of educational experiences that would constitute a complete, coherent program? Can the hundreds of major fields available in today's colleges and universities each really require the identical period of study?

Answers to questions like these and acceptable definitions of educational terminal points would be closer if the present structure of academic degree programs were known in more detail. Different academic programs, at different levels from the freshman through senior years, presumably have a variety of academic competencies associated with them in many different combinations. If these academic competencies were identified and examined in their various interrelationships, they might be organized into less arbitrary patterns than the ones associated with current four-year degree programs. The present study was a step in identifying the academic competencies that faculty members believe should be associated with the bachelor's degree.

The purpose of the present study was not to define the ideal college graduate or to describe in global terms the abilities or competencies that should be expected of college graduates. College programs and the competencies to which they lead are too diverse to be described through reference to an ideal product. Attention was directed instead to the outcomes of specific courses in the belief that they collectively make up the product that is recognized with the award of a bachelor's degree.

Slightly more than 300 faculty members in 15 California colleges and universities selected two students in one of their courses--one whom they considered a particularly good student and one a poor student--and described how each differed from an average student. This procedure focused the faculty members' attention on specific students and specific behavior rather than on abstract conceptions of what colleges are supposed to help their students accomplish. Random selection of the classes from which the students to be described were picked assured representation across the variety of academic objectives found in different college programs. At each of the 15 institutions, the classes were grouped by academic area and level and selected randomly within each group. The area groups consisted of humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and applied areas, such as business or engineering. Level referred to upper division or lower division classification. The 15 colleges and universities were all four-year institutions but were diverse with respect to size, selectivity, public or private control, and breadth of program. Two are predominantly women's colleges,

three are Roman Catholic, and one is an institute of science and engineering.

The written descriptions of good and poor students were analyzed by isolating the separate phrases in each description, organizing them into categories, and counting the frequencies with which different descriptive categories were used in different kinds of classes and by different kinds of faculty members. The justification for this process is the belief that the capabilities faculty members want their students to have will be found in the ways they distinguish a good student from an ordinary one, and that these capabilities collectively define faculty members' perceptions of what a college degree is to represent.

With the inevitable arbitrariness of any classification scheme, 99 separate descriptive words or phrases were identified. Phrases like "Wants to achieve" and "Desires mastery of subject" were considered essentially the same in spite of fine distinctions such as that between achievement and mastery. These 99 phrases were organized into 18 groups, and the 18 groups into 7 broader categories. This three-level organization and the percentage of the total group of faculty members who used each category are shown in the handout.

The first broad category, labeled General Intellectual Ability, consists largely of capabilities students have already developed by the time they enter college. Insight, maturity, and intellectual power certainly affect academic performance, but the extent to which they can be developed by an educational program at the college level is difficult to say. The second category, Inquisitiveness, is similar but may include more elements of behavior that

are acquired through exposure to an intellectual environment. The third category, dealing with problem solving, seems likely to be often an indirect outcome of college attendance acquired through observation of instructors and more advanced students acting as models. The fourth category, Course-related Intellectual Performance, includes those capabilities that are typically taught, that are explicit goals of instruction.

Each of these first four categories except the third was used by slightly more than half of the faculty members in the study. All but the fourth seem either beyond the reach of direct instruction or the result of an interaction between characteristics the student brings to the learning situation and characteristics of the learning environment. The nature of the learning environment is to a large extent under the control of the institution and may justify more attention than it customarily gets relative to the attention now given to details of organization and presentation of curricular material and to testing how well it has been absorbed. College students do not learn to be intellectually curious, to ask probing questions or to apply familiar concepts to new situations in the same way they learn to manipulate, organize, or operate on factual material. Most instructional procedures seem established to develop the fourth kind of student capability, neglecting the first three.

The fifth category deals with interest and involvement in the course. More than any other category, it probably results from an interaction between the student and the quality of the environment in which he or she operates. That some element of this category was used by more than 80 per cent of the faculty

members, far more than any other category, in describing the characteristic behavior of students whose academic performance set them apart from others gives substance to the belief of many college students that what they learn is not as critical in their evaluation by the faculty as the attitude they project. To what extent can personableness, interest, and involvement substitute for academic accomplishment in faculty evaluations of student performance?

The sixth category consists of descriptions of academic performance not associated with any particular course. It includes general statements of performance and personal differences in the way performance is achieved. The seventh category is essentially residual, including personal qualities such as integrity and sensitivity that may or may not be associated with academic performance.

Several questions basic to higher education are raised by the nature and frequency of citation of the seven broad categories. For example, how much of the intellectual development that occurs as an incidental result of the student's activities and involvement in an academic setting could be made the direct objective of specific instructional procedures? How can the widespread current efforts to develop alternative, off-campus paths to a college education provide the indirect effects of immersion in an academic milieu that seem to be such an important part of academic performance?

In view of the variety of elements associated with academic performance, determining which elements should be the subject of credit and certification is a complex issue. Categories 3, 4, and 6 are the only ones of the seven

that include course-related accomplishment. If they should be the primary basis for credit and certification, the predominance of Category 5 as the most frequently cited attribute of superior students raises questions about current practice. If the student's attitude, approach to the class, or style of performance are to be judged with actual accomplishment in determining credit and certification, the relative importance of each needs to be made explicit.

In the combination of a variety of elements into a single concept labeled academic performance, some elements are probably critical while others are desirable but expendable. Which is which? In the present study integration of knowledge was given substantially more attention than differentiation or analysis. Is this a justifiable difference?

The relative frequencies with which different elements of performance were mentioned do not necessarily indicate relative importance. Yet the same tendency for one kind of performance to come to mind and get mentioned more readily than another may also lead to that element's being made the basis for student evaluations more often than the other. Again, the relative importance of different components of performance deserves attention.

Reference

Dressel, P. L., & DeLisle, F. H. Undergraduate curriculum trends. Washington, American Council on Education, 1969.

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Categories of Student Performance

(Figures are percentages of the total sample of 312 faculty members who used each category)

1.	General intellectual ability	56
11.	Intellectual acuity	41
111.	Able to grasp ideas, understand	12
112.	Able to pursue ideas reflectively	8
113	Capable, bright	11
114.	Has insight, perceptive	6
115.	Has inherent ability in subject	2
116.	Has good recall, memory	3
117.	Able to respond effectively to questions	6
118	Able to formulate questions	1
119.	High critical ability	6
12.	Intellectual maturity	4
121.	Intellectual maturity	3
122.	Perspective	1
123.	Common sense	1
13.	Verbal capability	26
131.	Expresses himself well	7
132	Writes clearly, effectively	11
133.	Writes critically; analytically	6
134.	Reads well	7
135.	Knows how to listen	2
2.	Inquisitiveness, intellectual venturesomeness	53
21.	General inquisitiveness	39
211.	Intellectually curious, inquisitive	11
212.	General desire to overcome ignorance; admits ignorance; displays honest doubt	7
213.	Asks relevant, thoughtful questions	23
214.	Asks creative questions	3
215.	Recognizes and waits for meaningful answers to questions	2

22. Desire for breadth of understanding	9	
221. Asks for understanding, challenges teachers for broader conception		7
222. Looks for causes and processes, not just results		2
23. Desire for depth of understanding	16	
231. Asks questions for clarification		3
232. Alert for discrepancies, inconsistencies		3
233. Questions validity of ideas		8
234. Questions own beliefs		3
235. Questions in light of particular perspective		2
3. Problem-solving ability	29	
31. General problem-solving ability	14	
311. Able to solve difficult problems		4
312. Chooses most difficult problems		3
313. Understands problems and sources of difficulty		3
314. Distinguishes among types of problems		2
315. Sees several ways of solving difficult problems		1
316. Improves on solutions presented in class		3
317. Creates own problems to solve		1
32. Application of learning to problem solving	20	
321. Able to apply concepts and materials previously learned to the solution of new problems		11
322. Relates accumulated information to understanding problems and concepts		11
4. Specific, course-related intellectual performance	59	
41. Acquisition of knowledge	32	
411. Knows information, facts, concepts, technical vocabulary		14

412.	Learns finer points, details of discipline		3
413.	Internalizes material, digests it		17
414.	Sensitive to nuances of language		1
415.	Has command of the field		5
42.	Operations on knowledge acquired	46	
422.	Able to integrate, synthesize, generalize		29
423.	Able to differentiate components, different aspects of a complex whole		2
424.	Differentiates general from particular, fact from hypothesis, important from unimportant		5
425.	Uses knowledge, techniques, concepts		11
426.	Sees implications of theory and applications to practice		5
427.	Links material to own experience, speculates from experience		9
428.	Validates theory independently from own experience		7
5.	Approach to course	83	
51.	Interest, involvement, motivation	63	
511.	Interested in subject matter		51
512.	Seeks feedback, asks for critical comment		5
513.	Uses teacher as resource; pursues issues with teacher		7
514.	Gets involved in assignments; sees value in coursework		8
515.	Wants to achieve; desires mastery of subject		7
516.	Has critical but not antagonistic approach to course		3
517.	Not very concerned with grade		9
52.	Class participation	60	
521.	Participates in class discussions		29
522.	Stimulates class discussion		8
523.	Comes to class prepared, has questions		19
524.	Regular in attendance		35

525. Alert in class 7
526. Keeps communication going in class 6
527. Helpful to other students; contributes to their learning 10
528. Doesn't monopolize class time 2
529. Wants to communicate with other students 4

53. Out-of-class preparation 39

531. Does extra work, works beyond requirements 17
532. Keeps up with course 14
533. Uses collateral material 4
534. Turns assignments in on time 3

6. Academic performance 57

61. General academic performance 31

611 Good academic performance 12
612. Exams are good; does well on all types of exams 15
613. Well prepared; widely read; good general education 10

62. Personal style of performance 27

621. Shows creativity, individuality; gives projects an individual stamp 7
622. Consistent in performance 4
623. Persistent; thorough (stays with material until he understands it thoroughly) 6
624. Works carefully; follows instructions closely 8
625. Works efficiently 2

63. Specific kinds of performance 21

631. Uses many references; writing shows research 12
632. Answers exam questions analytically; questions the questions 3
633. Answers questions concisely; factually 4

634.	Oral presentations are well done, thorough; doesn't depend on notes		5
635.	Good penmanship		1
7.	Personal qualities	42	
71.	Academically relevant personal qualities	39	
711.	Independent		17
712.	Creative		8
713.	Self-disciplined		6
714.	Demanding of self and others		4
715.	Has leadership ability		3
716.	Responsible		2
717.	Has integrity		1
718.	Sure of goals; good career perspective; has commitment;		9
719.	Self-assured		7
72.	Personal qualities unrelated to academic performance	7	
721.	Friendly, open, well liked		3
722.	Older; returned veteran		1
723.	Good sense of humor		1
724.	Shy		1
725.	Sensitive		1
726.	Nervous, intense		1

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